

“Santa Claus Jesus” - Isaiah 9:2-7
Pastor Burt Garwood – December 10, 2017

Santa shows up in department stores and malls across America this time of year. Kids sit on his lap and tell him what they want for Christmas. Our modern-day Santa has morphed over time to be the jolly old saint Nick that we know and love today. But what is his real history?

- The original saint Nick was a Greek born 280 years after Christ, and became bishop of Myra, a small town in Turkey.
- He gained popularity by being an advocate for children. One story goes that saint Nick saved three young girls from a life of prostitution when he secretly delivered three bags of gold to their indebted father who then bought their freedom.
- Nicholas was neither fat nor jolly but developed a reputation as a fiery, wiry, and defiant defender of church doctrine during the "Great Persecution," when Bibles were put to the torch and priests made to renounce Christianity or face execution. Nicholas defied these edicts and spent years in prison before emperor Constantine rose to power and brought Christianity to prominence in his empire.
- When the crypt at the Basilica San Nicola was repaired in the 1950s, the saint's skull and bones were documented with x-ray photos and thousands of detailed measurements.
- Caroline Wilkinson, a facial anthropologist at the University of Manchester (England), used modern software simulations to put a human face on Santa's original namesake—one with a broken nose, possibly suffered during the persecution of Christians under the Roman Emperor Diocletian. [National Geographic website]
- From there Santa has morphed into our modern-day Santa who lives at the North Pole, has elves who make Christmas presents and then delivers them somehow all in one night on his superfast sleigh.

What does God look like? The best picture we have of God is Jesus in the flesh.

- Jesus came to earth as a fragile babe in a manger. He was born a Jew, into a community that had been marginalized and oppressed by the Romans.
- When King Herod threatened to kill him as a child, his parents fled with him to Egypt where he spent his early years as a refugee.
- His boyhood was spent in Nazareth, a town that in one place in the Bible, people said, “How could anything good come out of Nazareth?”
- But the prophet Isaiah said this 700 years before Jesus was born. READ: Isaiah 9:6
- You know how he gathered 12 disciples who followed his teachings and how he died on the cross and rose from the dead three days later to free us from sin, death and satan.

But Jesus’ story tends to get lost in the materialistic celebrations at Christmas.

- We put Jesus-like characteristics on Santa in the song “Santa Claus is coming to Town”. This Santa character does Jesus-like things...he sees us when we’re sleeping and awake and knows when we’ve been bad or good.
- It seems as if we have reduced Christmas to a Santa Claus character who gives us whatever we need and want.

- We tend to treat Jesus the same way: That Jesus exists to fulfill all our earthly wishes. God gets reduced to one who blesses us with material blessings so that we can live happy and comfortable lives in the now.
- With this faulty view of Jesus as the magical gift-giver, it’s no wonder our expectations of the Christmas season have become distorted.

But Jesus did not come down a chimney. He is not Santa.

- God’s gifts cannot be found in a stocking, but must be received in our hearts.
- God came to work miracles in a broken world.
- Christmas is the celebration of a miracle...God born in human flesh to save us from sin.
- But we’ve edged the miracle worker out of his own birthday.

It’s time to take Christmas back by planning new traditions that focus on Jesus’ presence in our lives rather than presents under the tree. Not that all this Christmas stuff is bad. But it tends to crowd Jesus out and turn Christmas into a materialistic celebration rather than honoring Jesus on his birthday. Here’s some things you can do to put Jesus back into Christmas:

1. Make it a practice read the Christmas story from Luke 2:1-20. And in the days leading up to Christmas, read about it from the first couple chapters of Matthew and Luke and as well.
2. Be a witness who serves. READ: Acts 1:8
 - The same Holy Spirit who helped Mary conceive and have a virgin birth is living inside of you. And he wants to create change in the world through God’s action in your life.
 - In the same way that Jesus once sent his angel to announce to Mary that she would be pregnant, Jesus comes to ordinary people today and works through us for extraordinary God-sized things. We must be willing to be used.
 - Jesus was born not just to die sacrificially for us, but also to show us how to live sacrificially.

The first Christmas was about a poor young couple who were just trying to make a go at life. Mary and Joseph didn’t really get the message of Christmas either at that point. They were just trying to survive.

- Little did they know that the cradle was tied to the cross. And that their newborn son would sacrifice his life for humanity.
- Your life is most meaningful when it’s being given away.
- Meaning isn’t found in mindless spending, eating and Christmas preparations. Meaning is found when we give sacrificially to those in need. Because in doing so, we are pointing them to Jesus.
- How are you doing with living sacrificially this Christmas?
- Who are you going to serve?
- Who will benefit from God’s blessings in your life this Christmas?